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Uncomfortable Bedfellows: Shakespeare and Global Studies

Alexa Alice Joubin

- 1 Elements of world cultures inform Shakespeare's plays, and those plays have subsequently been translated and performed in many languages. Characters from the Mediterranean,¹ Cataian (Cathay),² France,³ Vienna, and Venice play a key role in the tragedies, comedies, and even in the history plays that focus on the question of English identity. Modern actors bring their own racial and gender identities to such characters as Catherine in *Henry V* and Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, and audiences bring their own worldviews to these performances. Shakespeare adaptations are therefore closely associated with global studies.
- 2 The first phase of sustained study of Shakespeare, world cultures, and globalization unfolded over the past few decades where transnational power dynamics are brought to bear on Shakespeare's afterlife.⁴ The current, second phase of global studies is challenging fixed notions of cultural authenticity.⁵ Recent adaptations reflect the fact that the transnational cultural flows go beyond the scope of geopolitical divisions of nation-states and cultural profiling.
- 3 Nevertheless, Shakespeare and global studies remain strange bedfellows due to conventional disciplinary siloes and the general public's investment in Shakespeare as an "English" canon in terms of its cultural affiliation. Odd as it may seem, global Shakespeare conveniently offers answers to competing demands from both conservative and neoliberal societies. For both conservatives and innovators, the genre of global Shakespeare is politically expedient in free-market economy where art has been used to compartmentalize and commercialize private emotions and identities. For these reasons, Shakespeare and global studies have a conducive yet fraught relationship.
- 4 This article employs a site-specific lens to examine Shakespeare and global studies as a multidisciplinary field, demonstrating how the fields can benefit from methods of each other. The study of global Shakespeares combines methodologies of dramaturgy, film and performance studies, critical race and gender studies, and theories of cultural

exchange. Multidisciplinary scholarship catches things that may otherwise fall through the cracks between established fields.

- 5 Since adaptations are hybrid in style and do not have one single point of cultural origin, films and theatre accrue site-specific meanings as they are toured or viewed in different locations. The settings of each adaptation also localize dramaturgical meanings of the stories. Further, digital forms of audience engagement disperse and change cultural meanings. Digital, global Shakespeares, therefore, unmark the territorial “origins” of Shakespearean narratives by introducing hybrid cultural elements. Adaptations bear the trans-historical marks of multiple cultures.
- 6 The multiplicity of the plural term “global performances” helps us push back against deceptively harmonious images of Shakespeare’s ubiquitous presence. However, there remains the challenge of collation of empirical data. Globalization is difficult to study empirically when “evidence is far better organized on a national rather than cross-border basis.”⁶ I will demonstrate fruitful application of global studies methods to Shakespeare studies through three critical tools: global penumbra, site-specific epistemologies, and digital performance studies in the era of the global pandemic of COVID-19.

A Global Penumbra

- 7 The first tool we use for analysis, the notion of penumbra, brings a global studies method to Shakespeare studies. Several adaptations I examine share important themes in common even though they seem to bear different cultural coordinates at first blush. They form a global penumbra of multiple cultural texts as they evoke discrete plot elements of Shakespeare and culturally-specific themes. When light is shed over an opaque object, it casts a shadow with a partially shaded outer region. Judith Buchanan theorizes that in this manner adaptations contain a “textual penumbra,” a body of extra-textual information that is closely associated with the adaptations and that enriches the meanings of the adaptations.⁷ An innocuous penumbra could be audiences’ awareness of previous works by the artist. A more intrusive penumbra could be directors’ statements on record or the significance of the venue. These examples are chosen to demonstrate how methods of global studies – such as cultural analysis – can further our understanding of site-specific meanings of Shakespeare today. Case studies on the following pages explore the ways in which contrasting forms of somatic and linguistic embodiment enrich the relationships between Shakespeare and global studies. Some of these examples bill themselves as Shakespearean adaptations, while others do not advertise any clear artistic relationship with Shakespeare.
- 8 Belonging to the first type – works that acknowledge Shakespeare’s plays as their sources – is *HamletIRAN*. Set in modern Iran, *HamletIRAN* (dir. Mahmood Karimi-Hakak, 2011) takes place around a pool, the centerpiece in traditional Persian gardens. Despite her ardent wish to set things right, the tormented heroine does not act rashly for fear her country may fall into chaos. Under an image of Mount Damavand, courtiers in turbans scheme while other characters sing Persian folk songs. Something is rotten in the country where the Green Movement arose in the wake of voting fraud that led to the 2009 re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The global penumbra around this adaptation evokes Iranian politics and the metaphor of a corrupt court in *Hamlet*. The Iranian-American director said that he cast women in most of the roles to highlight

the need of “freedom for all Iranians” and Iranian women’s contribution to the “struggle against the regime.”⁸ Ironically, even though the play is set in modern Iran, it was staged at Siena College in Albany, New York, rather than Iran, due to censorship. The production’s poster (figure 1) alludes to censorship and the unspeakable by showing a black skull with green tapes crossing over its mouth. The eye glasses worn by the figure evokes soldiers’ gas masks. The green glasses further evoke those in night vision binoculars on the battlefield. A sword, shaped like a cross and dripping with blood, penetrates the top of the skull, reaching all the way to the nose. Ultimately, this is a political play – a piece of “floating” Iranian Shakespeare – made in the U.S. for American audiences.

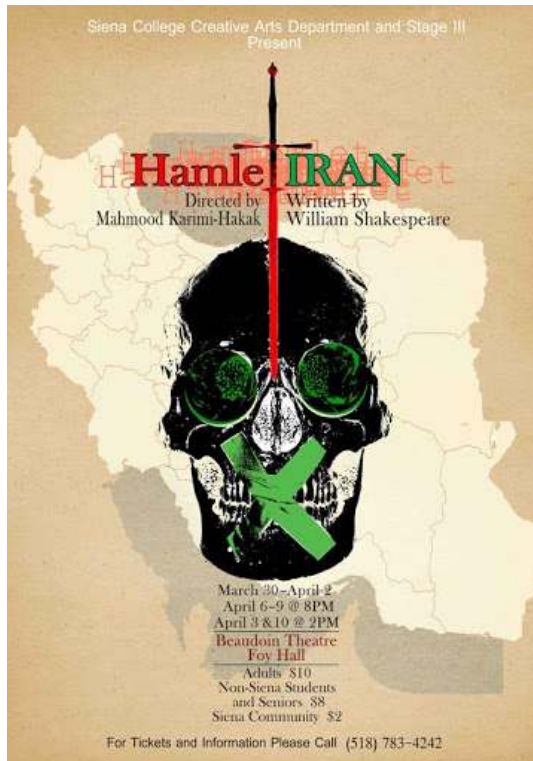


Figure 1. Poster of *HamletIRAN*, directed by Mahmood Karimi-Hakak, Siena College, 2011. Image in the public domain.

- 9 Also belonging to this same group of works with an advertised relationship to Shakespeare is the whodunit thriller *The Hungry* (dir. Bornila Chatterjee, 2017). The film markets itself as an Indian interpretation of Shakespeare. The adaptation of *Titus Andronicus* takes place almost entirely within the walls of the private estate of a business tycoon named Tathagat Ahuja (Naseeruddin Shah) in contemporary New Delhi. The film builds toward a gory *dénouement*, a wedding feast where the vengeful widow Tulsi Joshi (Tisca Chopra) meets Tathagat’s cruelty, with a menu featuring human flesh (figure 2). Tathagat, depicted as fond of the culinary art, tells the couple “I have made a feast with my own hands” as he welcomes them into the banquet hall. The camera lingers on close-up shots of the couple’s mouths and how they lick their fingers. Bent on revenge for the murder of her son, Tulsi ends up being killed herself. Feasting becomes an act driven by animalistic desires. After all of the characters are killed, a group of black goats wander into the banquet hall to devour what is left on the table and to cleanse the sins. The grotesque gives way to a cyclical process of natural turnover.



Figure 2. The final banquet scene in *The Hungry* (dir. Bornila Chatterjee, Cinestaan Film Company, 2017). Screen grab.

- 10 The backdrop of the Indian wedding is, in director Chatterjee's words, "inherently dramatic," because weddings in general force "a whole bunch of people to come together for a certain number of days." In this particular film, the wedding "brings out the worst in people."⁹ Similar to *HamletIRAN*, this film situates itself within a penumbra of Shakespearean and contemporary politics. Audiences with differing cultural backgrounds may focus more, or less, on various parts of the penumbra. The riveting feature film comes from one of India's rising female directors who stands at the cross-roads of cultural influences. The cast is Indian (including *Life of Pi*'s Suraj Sharma), but the director's approach to story-telling fuses elements from multiple traditions. The film is a co-production between Film London and India's Cinestaan. With a BFA in film from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, Chatterjee was named a fellow of the Sundance Institute/Mumbai Mantra Screenwriters Lab in 2014. Both *HamletIRAN* and *The Hungry*, as recent examples of global Shakespeare, are created by directors with American training or artistic association.
- 11 The second type of works – those with what Kathleen McLuskie calls "attenuated" references to Shakespeare – include the Saudi film *Barakah Meets Barakah* and the French film *Ophélia*.¹⁰ While *HamletIRAN* exemplifies political theatre, other Middle Eastern works eschew politics and even downplay their allusions to Shakespeare. *Barakah Meets Barakah* (Baraka Yua'abil Baraka, dir. Mahmoud Sabbagh), a rare romantic comedy film from Saudi Arabia, structures its love story around Hamlet's tentative relationship with Ophelia, but the attenuated allusions are notable only to those who are familiar with *Hamlet*.¹¹ The film portrays the relationship between Barakah (Hisham Fageeh), a middle-class bureaucrat, and Barakah (Fatima Al Banawi), a feminist fashion vlogger. The pair struggles against strict conventions of their society. The male Barakah is shown living a rather dull life issuing citations of minor offences as he walks around Jeddah, while the female Barakah has a livelier personality.
- 12 The film came out in 2016, two years before the ban on public film theatres was lifted in 2018 by the country's Minister of Culture and Information. As such, the film and its stage-within-the-film comment on the status of the entertainment industry in Saudi Arabia. For example, when he is not working, Barakah performs as part of an amateur theatre troupe. In one scene, unable to find women to participate in their production, Barakah's troupe had him play Ophelia. He appears in drag, thickly bearded. Instead of embracing his stage role, Barakah looks dejected in his blonde wig and green teal ball gown. His chest hair pokes out of his faux Elizabethan bodice. In an earlier scene,

backstage, he strains to zip up the costume, and he is coached on how to simulate having breasts (figure 3).



Figure 3: Barakah (Hisham Fageeh) in drag in *Barakah Meets Barakah* (dir. Mahmoud Sabbagh, El Housh Productions, 2016). Screen grab (DVD).

- 13 Finally onstage, Barakah plays the “mad” Ophelia stiffly in a monotone: “They bore him barefaced on the bier, and in his grave rain’d many a tear.” The scene serves both as comic relief and a sober reminder of Saudi law that prohibits women from performing with men. The camera – with a frontal shot with deep focus – follows Barakah as he moves laterally on a small stage handing out flowers, telling an off-camera audience: “That’s for remembrance. Pray you, love, remember.” Improvising and interspersing the otherwise stylized lines with modern language, he continues stage right: “And you, take this, I would give you some violets, but they withered all when he died.” Barakah, inspired by his involvement in theatre, has a dream in which he plays Hamlet alongside his lover who plays Ophelia. Whereas *HamletIRAN* and *The Hungry* are designed and billed as adaptations of Shakespeare, *Barakah Meets Barakah* has not been recognized even as having any relationship to *Hamlet*, and has not circulated widely outside Saudi Arabia.¹²
- 14 Some attenuated allusions to Shakespeare are more fleeting and decontextualized from the plays’ penumbra, even though these instances of *mise en abyme* do attest to Shakespeare’s global reach in our times across many media. For instance, “Shakespeare” is deployed as a reminder of human civilization in Miguel Sapochnik’s post-apocalyptic film *Finch* (2021). In a philosophical scene that probes the question of what it means to be human, Finch Weinberg (Tom Hanks), the sole survivor, takes a humanoid robot he built into a derelict theatre to salvage food. It may seem coincidental in the plot, but clearly dramaturgically intentional, when that theatre turns out to be the venue for “Springfield Shakespeare Festival.” The camera lingers frequently on the marquee with the word “Shakespeare” above the entrance. Inside the theatre, the android passes in front of a poster of a production of *Much Ado About Nothing* and spontaneously offers an analysis of that play in his monotonic, synthetic voice. His analysis, casual as it may seem, echoes the theme of post-apocalyptic mistrust: “This is a play by William Shakespeare, a dramatic comedy about love, deception, and other human misunderstanding.” As it turns out, this is a pivotal scene where the android becomes sentient. He discovers himself for the first time in a mirror in the lobby. In a later scene, the android, in more fluid speech, tells Finch that he wishes to be named “William Shakespeare.” To have a name, for the android, is to be

human, and to choose Shakespeare implies that at some level the idea of Shakespeare encapsulates human identity.

- 15 Other instances contain direct quotations from Shakespeare for their indexical value to demonstrate a character's intellect. In Destin Daniel Cretton's blockbuster *Shang-Chi and The Legend of The Ten Rings* (2021), Ben Kingsley's actor-character Trevor Slattery tells Shang-Chi and Katy that he loves Shakespeare, while dressing like Shakespeare and displaying Shakespearean props and memorabilia from his acting career before his capture. Slattery proceeds to recite iconic lines from monologues in *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. Hands on his temples, in agony, Slattery says, in a dramatic tone: "Whence is that knocking? Wake Duncan with thy knocking!" Ever so proud of his performance of *Macbeth*, he tells Shang-Chi that "they couldn't get enough of it. I've been doing weekly ghosts for lads ever since." Volunteering to give his audience of two further "previews," Slattery launches into the Fool's speech in *King Lear*: "nuncle, nuncle, nuncle ..." Beyond these fragmented quotations in a film that has nothing to do with Shakespeare, this meta-theatrical scene carries extra weight because Kingsley began his career at the Royal Shakespeare Company and starred in multiple Shakespearean productions. Onscreen, he is known for his performance of Feste in Trevor Nunn's 1996 film version of *Twelfth Night*.



Figure 4. Ben Kingsley's Trevor Slattery plays Macbeth in Destin Daniel Cretton's *Shang-Chi and The Legend of The Ten Rings* (Marvel Studios, 2021).

- 16 Attenuated allusions to Shakespeare in the form of *mise en abyme* have appeared frequently in globally high-profile films over the past decades, sometimes as hidden messages known as "Easter eggs" in the film industry. Arnold Schwarzenegger makes a cameo appearance as King Lear in Steven Spielberg's science fiction film *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997). Schwarzenegger's Lear appears against a backdrop of raging fire on a poster, "William Shakespeare's *King Lear*," designed by legendary illustrator Drew Struzan. Film audiences catch a glimpse of the *Lear* poster (figure 5) in a video store before a bus crashes into it. As with *Finch*, Spielberg's film uses the presence of Shakespeare as vestiges of human civilization. That civilization – condensed in the films in this video store, including a fictional *Lear* film – is subsequently destroyed by dinosaurs that run amok.

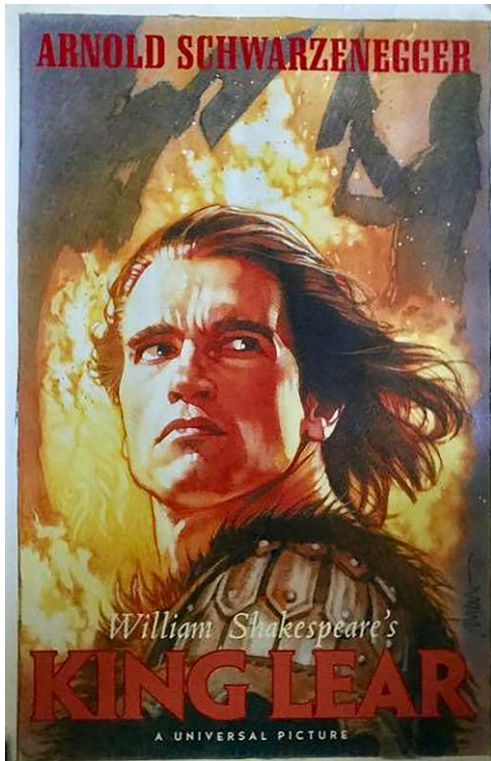


Figure 5. A poster in Steven Spielberg's science fiction film *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997) advertising an imaginary Universal Picture film entitled *William Shakespeare's King Lear*, starring the action star Arnold Schwarzenegger.

- 17 Schwarzenegger's cameo here pays tribute to his performance of Hamlet in John McTiernan's *Last Action Hero* in 1993. When an English teacher screens Laurence Olivier's film *Hamlet* (1948) in class, a daydreaming school boy imagines *Hamlet* as an action film starring his favorite action hero Jack Slater (Schwarzenegger). In an uncanny moment, Schwarzenegger's Terminator-esque Slater wears Olivier's costumes and holds a rifle. He does not hesitate to kill other characters in *Hamlet*, and always has a straightforward answer to such questions as "To be, or not to be?" as he blows up his enemies.
- 18 Other attenuated references to Shakespeare are more visually apparent, though they remain marginal to the main narratives. Teasing audience's expectations, Claude Chabrol's *Ophélia* (Boreal Film, 1963) names its Shakespearean precedence in its title only to erase Hamlet and Ophelia. In contrast to *HamletIRAN*, this film has a cursory, and oftentimes evasive, relationship to Shakespeare. This is not a re-telling of Ophelia's or Hamlet's story. Family takes on sinister meanings of oppression in French postwar cinema. Similar to *The Hungry*, "family" is framed as an oppressive structure in *Ophélia*. Nouvelle vague (New Wave) film director Claude Chabrol, who is known as "the French Hitchcock,"¹³ comments on France's identity and economic crisis in this film. In contrast to his *Les Bonnes femmes* (1960) which depicts female sexuality through the misadventures of four young women in Paris, *Ophélia* – despite its title – focuses on the son of a factory owning family, Yvan Lesurf (played by André Jocelyn). Ever so self-indulgent, Yvan wanders the mansion and its grounds reciting poetry. When he stumbles upon Laurence Olivier's 1948 film version of *Hamlet* in a local cinema, Yvan sets out to become a Hamlet himself – parallel to how James Joyce's Stephen Daedalus and Goethe's Wilhelm Meister embody select aspects of *Hamlet*.

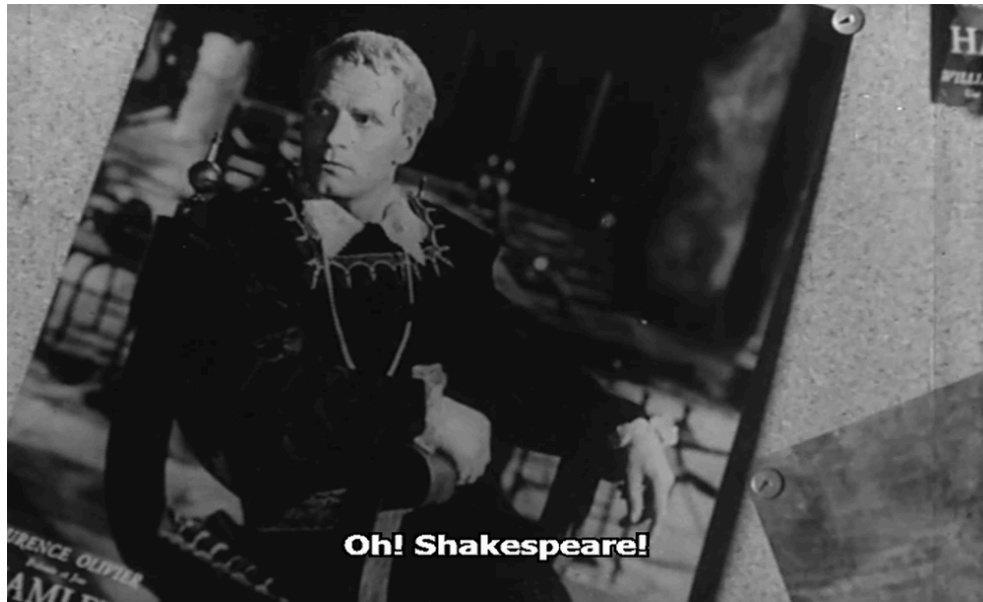


Figure 6. A close-up shot of film stills of Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* outside a theatre in Claude Chabrol's *Ophélia* (1963). Screen grab (DVD).

- 19 In the scene with the most sustained reference to Shakespeare, a small crowd is shown gathering outside a theatre with enthusiasm about Olivier's "love story" before the camera zooms in to linger, for an extended sequence, on various stills of Olivier's film (figure 6). Yvan walks past the crowd and meditates briefly about his own life in front of Olivier's poster, but does not step into the theatre. As he strolls along, a dialogue, dubbed in French, from Olivier's film is heard (figure 7). The dialogue and the visuals serve as *mise en abyme* as well as an inner voice of Yvan. A typical protagonist of the New Wave cinema, Yvan is a "spontaneous young character" depicted in Chabrol's "unpolished [...] film style."¹⁴ Ironically, Yvan's arc marginalizes the tangential story of a woman who says repeatedly "Je ne suis pas Ophélia. Je suis Lucy." There is no plot parallel between Lucy's story and that of Shakespeare's Ophelia. The name Ophelia becomes a "free-floating apostrophe" in Chabrol's film, because the narrative refers repeatedly to the state of not being Ophelia.¹⁵



Figure 7. Yvan walks past a poster of Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* in Claude Chabrol's *Ophélia* (1963). Screen grab (DVD).

Site-specific epistemologies and global studies

- 20 These examples showcase the complex relations between Shakespeare and global studies. This brief sampling of global Shakespeares reveals that, despite their divergent features, adaptations are informed by shifting site-specific epistemologies and a dense network of cross-references.
- 21 The second tool we will use, therefore, is site-specific analysis. Site-specific epistemologies consist of the production and dissemination of location-based meanings, as “epistemic evaluation” depends on “practical concerns” such as the cultural backgrounds of the artists and audiences.¹⁶ In the ethnographic sense, the setting (*mise-en-scène*) and venue of performances are key to location-specific narratives and knowledge.
- 22 The physical, fictional and geocultural dimensions of the cultural work signify relationally, and these meanings interact with local histories that are embedded within and superimposed upon the performances, as does Brexit in Richard Eyre's film *Lear* (2018). Made in New York State, *HamletIRAN* addresses topics sensitive to Iranian censors through the floating allegorical structure of *Hamlet*, while *The Hungry* and *Barakah Meet Barakah* reference *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet* in cursory but creative fashions. Further, the adaptations map public affairs in Shakespeare onto contemporary domestic spaces and aesthetics in Indian and Saudi cinemas. Site-specific networks reveal that the transhistorical connections between Shakespeare and us are articulated both on the epic scale and on a local scale.
- 23 Site-specific ideologies also manifest themselves through censorship of or local aversion to particular plays. *Hamlet* and other tragedies were banned by Joseph Stalin in 1935 when he declared that life could only be joyful in the communist state, and Japanese censors banned *Hamlet* in the 1930s on the ground of its potential to incite resurgence against the country's rightist government.¹⁷
- 24 *Henry V*, for instance, had never been staged professionally in the French language at a major venue in France until 1999, according to Philippe Torreton. This is significant when we consider that there is a long history of French engagement with Shakespeare, including all three parts of *Henry VI*. If we expand the scope to Francophone countries and smaller venues, there were two productions of this play earlier. There was a production of *Henry V* in French by Rideau de Bruxelles (directed by Claude Étienne) at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, Belgium, in 1953,¹⁸ and the Comédie de l'Ouest seemed to have mounted a production in Rennes, France, in 1962. For the latter, neither of the two extant sources names the director, which is a sign of its historical obscurity.¹⁹
- 25 As renowned actor Philippe Torreton (recipient of l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres) puts it, French producers cannot imagine “Napoleon being invited to attend a representation of this triumphal English epic in the land of France,”²⁰ especially its portrayal of the French humiliation during the Battle of Agincourt. However, in the post-Brexit context, *Henry V* is gaining traction as it evolves from “a patriotic, partisan drama” into “one of healing and reconciliation.”²¹

- 26 When Torreton starred in Jean-Louis Benoit's 1999 *La Vie du Roi Henri V* in the prestigious venue of the Honour Court of the Palais des Papes during the Festival d'Avignon, he rejoiced at the absence of French predecessors. He wrote: "there is no one between Shakespeare and me, four hundred years since 1599,"²² alluding to actors' typical struggle to differentiate themselves from previous performances of the same roles.
- 27 While Torreton's claim to be the very first French actor to play the role should be qualified with further contexts, it is true that *Henry V* is very infrequently staged in France in the twentieth century. Even counting the aforementioned 1953 and 1962 productions – both of which were not major venues – the history play has been peculiarly absent on the French stage. Like a penumbra, previous productions of the same play haunt the present one by triggering some form of theatrical *déjà vu* in audiences' memories, as explored by Marvin Carlson in his *The Haunted Stage* (2003). Without the long shadow of major actors who came before him, Torreton had the freedom to present his own interpretation of the English monarch. Another factor at work, as translator Jean-Michel Déprats surmises, is that French artists and audiences are averse to the Shakespearean mingling of epic, comedic and tragic modes.²³ The popularity of any given play in any given culture reflects that culture's perceived affinity with the motifs of the play.
- 28 In addition to iconic characters or motifs, key scenes in Shakespeare have also been reworked to emphasize location-specific concerns, such as the division-of-the-kingdom scene in *King Lear*. Alluding to large-scale social dislocations, Grigori Kozintsev's film of *King Lear* (Lenfilm Studio, 1970) opens with an anxious multitude gathering to learn the fate of the kingdom. The site-specificity of such films as Kozintsev's extends through its visual landscape and narrative format.
- 29 Other adaptations add elements of merriment to the scene of the division of the kingdom. In Belarus Free Theatre's production during the World Shakespeare Festival (directed by Vladimir Shcherban, London Globe, 2012), *Lear* becomes both the volatile, capricious monarch and the clown in the very first scene. Amplifying the folkloric and comedic textures of Shakespeare's tragedy, Aleh Sidorchik's *Lear* emerges hunched over, in long, white hair. He slips, but as he falls, he whisks off his wig and laughs at the audience in a "gotcha" moment. The old age – traditionally the most sacred and horrifying element of this play – is turned inside out, as Sidorchik acts old, and toys with audience perception of old age in his parody. The traditional prop of a map of the kingdom is nowhere to be found. Instead, in *Lear*'s suitcase is the soil of the land that he plans to divide: each daughter would receive a "piece" of the land. To the tune of piano and accordion, Goneril and Regan take turns to sing and dance in comical manners in front of *Lear* to express their love and devotion.
- 30 Accruing site-specific meanings, *King Lear* now holds an important place in cinema and theatre works that rethink disability, mortality, and aging. New works articulate these themes through narratives about inter-generational conflicts. The theme of divisive politics gained further relevance in the post-Brexit era after the U.K.'s June 23, 2016, referendum to leave the European Union. An example of site-specific readings of Shakespeare is Richard Eyre's 2018 film *King Lear* (BBC), which has been interpreted as a Brexit allegory.²⁴ Turned out of doors by his daughters, Anthony Hopkins' exiled *Lear* finds himself an unaccommodated man in a refugee camp under pouring rain.

- 31 The film alludes to the issue of migration and the refugee crisis in Europe that peaked in 2015. Over one million asylum seekers, driven by wars and environmental disasters, arrived in Europe from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. In the post-Brexit context, there is dramatic irony in Lear's decision to cut familial and political ties with Cordelia, only to see her return from France to save him from oblivion. The disenfranchised Lear wanders among makeshift tents as a refugee, finally recognizing his own vulnerability. The Fool and Lear share one coat in the rain (figure 8), suggesting that the two characters are merging. The Fool disappears from the narrative after the refugee camp scene, and Lear begins wearing the Fool's hat and, literally and metaphorically, inhabiting the Fool's position. The asylum seekers in the refugee camp make social inequality visible and palpable, much like the peasants in the opening sequence of Kozintsev's film. Peasants, who would bear the grunt of political decisions, gather quietly outside the castle where Lear announces his plan which treats the division of the kingdom as an act of personal whim.

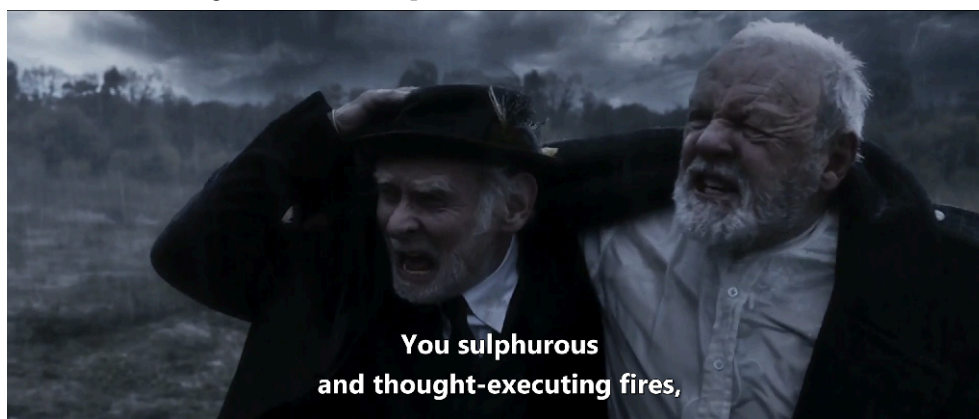


Figure 8. Lear (Anthony Hopkins) and the Fool (Karl Johnson) sharing a coat in the storm in Richard Eyre's *King Lear* (BBC, 2018). Screen grab (DVD).

- 32 Beyond site-specific meanings, there is a dense network of cross-references connecting all adaptations. The cases above relate more frequently to one another than to Shakespeare as sanctified source material. There are more aesthetic and ideological connections among global adaptations than first meet the eye, and not all adaptations are routed through cultural hegemony. Without reproducing Shakespeare's story or engaging directly with Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet*, Chabrol's *Ophélie* references a poster of Olivier's film as part of a network of cross-references. The archetype of Hamlet is deployed to capture the figure of the despondent in distinctively local contexts.
- 33 This approach to a classical text anticipates the Wooster Group's meta-media and multi-media *Hamlet* (dir. Elizabeth LeCompte, 2007) in which the actors projected onstage a filmed version of Richard Burton's 1964 *Hamlet* (dir. John Gielgud). Like a penumbra, Burton's performance ghosts and frames the Wooster Groups' production, befitting *Hamlet* the "spectral play."²⁵ It also becomes a pretext, as the poster of Olivier's film does in *Ophélie*, for artistic recycling and creativity.
- 34 Likewise, in the play-within-a-film in *Barakah Meets Barakah*, one hears echoes of familiar lines by Ophelia and sees references to – despite Baraka's awkward performance – the iconic scene where the mad Ophelia hands out flowers. In some ways, these adaptations de-center Shakespeare's singularity – the perceived infinite value of the canon – by turning Shakespearean lines or characters into a prop or a

pretext for narratives that have nothing to do with Shakespeare. *Hamlet* becomes one of the many nodes the adaptations' narratives pass through; it is no longer a point of origin for story-telling. These adaptations circumvent Shakespeare.

- 35 Adaptations operate at the crossroads of fiction and reality and represent an aggregate of overlapping localities. This feature gives the false impression that audiences everywhere would see universal messages with equal valence in Shakespeare. In fact, the local is not always the antithesis to the global or an antidote to the hegemonic domination that has been stereotypically associated with the West. Directors working in English and other languages have to negotiate similar challenges of presenting historical worldviews to modern audiences. Some of them use similar strategies despite their cultural differences. The design of Peter Brook's production of *Titus Andronicus* (1955) in Stratford-upon-Avon, for example, echoed Asian-inspired stylization. Lavinia has scarlet streamers coming out of her mouth, symbolizing blood, after her mutilation. The abstract, minimalist set distinguished Brook's production from most English productions of that play at the time which resorted to naturalistic portrayals of horror. Similarly, Japanese director Yukio Ninagawa's adaptation of the same play in 2006 used red ribbons to symbolize blood, which stood out against the mostly white and sterile set. Ninagawa's production at the Royal Shakespeare Company's Complete Works festival treated the play as myth. It presented recurring rituals in a cycle, such as the theme of revenge, through symbolism.²⁶
- 36 Cross-cultural residues can be found even in performances that are regarded as traditionally Anglophone, such as Australian director Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (Bazmark Films, 1996). Due to Luhrmann's use of Shakespeare's language for indexical value, the film has not usually been taught from the perspective of global studies. The film pitches Latin American Catholicism against North American Protestantism in its costumes, sets, and accents adopted by the Montagues and Capulets. Early modern English, protestant anxieties about Catholic Italy, as reflected in Shakespeare's play, are presented as sources of misunderstanding and conflict in modern gangland in the film. Mexico City and Boca del Rio in Veracruz, the film's primary shooting locations, are dressed up as a fictional American city called Verona Beach. The fictional and filming locations, attitudes toward Latinity in the film and Elizabethan English fantasies about Spain and Italy are meshed together to create a new "site" where youthful exuberance, religious sentiments and early modern and postmodern notions of feud and hatred play out. The campy film also parodies – for audiences familiar with other films – Italian director Franco Zeffirelli's lusty *Romeo and Juliet* (1968).²⁷
- 37 While site-specific performances – works designed to respond to and amplify the ambience of a venue, such as Eugenio Barba's *Ur-Hamlet* in the city of Elsinore and in Kronborg Castle, 2006²⁸ – are a distinctive genre in its own right, site-specific epistemologies inform all adaptations by virtue of their unique cultural reference points such as their setting and performance venues. The stage and, in the case of film, the cinema auditorium, are "sites of imagination" that are being "transformed by the disruptive presence of performance seeking a ... site-determined [and] site-conscious relationship" with new audiences.²⁹ Audiences and actors encounter each other in this new space between fiction and reality. "Site" therefore is constituted by the setting of a narrative, the city and venue of a performance or screening, and an adaptation's cultural reference points. *HamletIRAN*'s reference point may be Iranian politics, but it is

staged on a U.S. campus where such topics as the Green Movement are less sensitive. The part of site-specific epistemologies that an audience can access depends on their theatre-going habits and cultural backgrounds.

All the World's a Digital Stage

- 38 Just as live performances and film screenings reenact site-specific meanings, as Alvin Lim writes, digital video archives are also informed by their own site specificity in terms of the cultural location of curatorial labor and the location of consumption of the archival materials (points of access).³⁰ Viewing digital Shakespeare as a performed event – whether asynchronous or synchronous – connects the concept of re-play to liveness in performance.
- 39 Site-specific meanings of literature take a disembodied form in digital videos. The rise of global Shakespeares is part and parcel of the proliferation of digital videos on commercial and open-access platforms. In contrast to in-person performance events and analogue videos, digital video is a form of instantaneous, inter-connected communication. It is non-linear and non-sequential in nature. My research indicates that digital video has the unique ability to “support instant access to any sequence in a performance, as well as the means to re-order and annotate sequences, and to bring them into meaningful conjunction with other videos, texts and image collections.”³¹ Digital videos – despite their disembodied form – are key elements in shaping and propagating new, site-specific epistemologies.
- 40 The third and last tool we will use draws on digital performance studies. The outbreak of the global pandemic of COVID-19 closed live theatre events and cinemas worldwide, but the crisis also accelerated the globalization of Shakespearean performance. Theatre director Erin B. Mee writes optimistically that COVID-19 has created “an exciting new performance environment,” bringing artists and audiences together “from numerous nations” and creating “new possibilities for collaboration.” Digital forms of video communication have enabled “artists from around the world” to gather in virtual spaces “playing to international audiences rather than [...] to people who can get to a particular piece of real estate.”³² Thanks to Zoom, TikTok, and other platforms, any performance is now potentially a global event. For their participatory performance of *The Tempest*, Creation Theatre and Big Telly Theatre companies used the tagline: “live, interactive, and in your living room” anywhere in the world.³³ The Public Theatre in New York launched the *Brave New Shakespeare Challenge*.³⁴ They shared videos of their actors reading act 2 scene 2 of *Romeo and Juliet* in multiple languages, and invited the general public to share their own. The initiative has a global outlook, as evidenced by its emphasis of multilingual, user-created contents.
- 41 “Live” performances used to be distinguished from film – a more editorialized medium – by their cachet of being “ephemeral” and irrecoverable. However, these distinctions are going away, because more and more theatrical and filmic performances are mediated by the screen interfaces. In the case of Shakespearean performance, the screen interface frequently evokes and reframes other media, including the interfaces of the codex book, television programming, and live or pre-recorded theatrical events. The interface of the screen is now a portal through which audiences experience Shakespeare’s narratives with a range of associated artistic elements including costumes, sets, and music. That interface is itself shaped by modern ideologies and the

structures of screen genres. The pandemic of COVID-19 has further blurred the distinctions between feature films intended for the multiplex and made-for-television, or made-for-streaming, films in terms of funding structures, aspect ratios, and scope of production. The interfaces and the channels of distribution are merging quickly. Amazon, having acquired the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer movie company in 2021, is also capitalizing on its Prime Video streaming platform. Amazon Studios have already (co)produced a hundred original films, including the aforementioned *King Lear* by Richard Eyre in 2018 which was streamed as part of Amazon Prime.

- 42 Due to lockdown orders and restrictions on travel, audiences – trapped at home – took to streaming to engage with Shakespeare as a familiar classic. The pandemic has led to a proliferation of born-digital and digitized archival videos of Shakespeare in Western Europe, Canada, the UK and the US. Key players included the Berliner Ensemble, La Comédie Française, the Globe Theatre in London, the Royal Shakespeare Company, National Theatre, Stratford Festival in Canada, and the Folger Theatre in Washington, D.C. Digital streaming – live or pre-recorded – has helped Shakespeare go viral on a global scale. One reason for Shakespeare’s global popularity on digital media, as W. B. Worthen surmises, is its status as comforting, familiar go-to-material for uplifting the spirits during the pandemic.³⁵ Shakespeare skyrocketed to the top of the list of digital performance events during the pandemic in the forms of memes, quotable quotes about Shakespeare and the plague, and performances of select scenes.
- 43 There is one caveat. The screen interface immerses audiences in an alternate universe in such a way that audiences rarely question the screen’s aesthetic function. That interface often makes itself transparent even though it is generating the dramaturgical meanings central to the narratives. Douglas Lanier has urged critics to give equal weight, in their analyses of “screen[ed] Shakespeare,” to formal techniques as well as the politics of the medium of screen. In the post-COVID era, it is important to resist, as Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerri argue, “the impulse to abstract and smooth out the particularities of screens.”³⁶ I propose we achieve this by distinguishing live broadcasts of theatre performances in cinemas before COVID-19 from the remediation of Shakespeare in our current time – the mediatization of performance through such digital platforms as Zoom as well as the use of digital tools for remedial purposes due to COVID-related restrictions on public performances as public health measures.
- 44 As measures to contain the viral spread, the lockdown and stay-at-home orders have accelerated digital globalization, redefining liveness along the way. As Pascale Aebischer suggests, as a “chronological order” that seems to slow down time,³⁷ the lockdown motivates at-home audiences to break free of the limit of their temporality by engaging in escapism. There are also the spatial constraints imposed by the viral containment measure. Mobility is limited, even within one’s own neighborhood. By late April 2020, 54% of the global population (4.2 billion people) were subject to complete or partial lockdowns.³⁸ Audiences who are now “bounded in a nutshell” (*Hamlet* 2.2.273) seek virtual connections that transport them beyond their now fixed geographic locations to an alternative universe.
- 45 Digital broadcasting is nothing new, for, in the past decade, prominent organizations such as the Metropolitan Opera and Barbican Center have broadcast their programming to theatres and cinemas around the world, both live and pre-recorded. In the summer of 2017, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts broadcast in real-time Washington National Opera’s performance of *Aida* (dir. Francesca Zambello)

to the Nationals Park in Washington, D.C.³⁹ Both the audiences in the Kennedy Center and those in the baseball stadium enjoyed the show live – the former in the same space as the singers and the latter synchronously in a different space. These indoor and open-air digital performances remained “live,” communal experiences.

- 46 The new genre of born-digital performances has redefined the notion of liveness as “a temporal and spatial entity.”⁴⁰ The global pandemic has further expanded the idea of liveness. Asynchronous digital videos do not so much replicate theatrical experiences as they enable experiential and affective quality on personal electronic devices for private consumption. Blurring the boundary between film and theatre, both genres are detached from the palpable bodily presence of actors. Notably, viewers’ own subjectivity is also disembodied.⁴¹
- 47 Digital video has been a godsend for theatre companies during the prolonged pandemic. Artists and fundraisers tapped into digital video to maintain their visibility and increase the arts’ relevance to society. Their focus turned from playgoers in the physical playhouses to at-home audiences around the world. Some companies released pre-recorded performances on a time-limited basis on pre-scheduled intervals to drum up excitement. The sense of exclusivity paralleled the ephemerality and limited availability of live theatre. Some events were free. Others sold tickets at a fraction of the price of live shows. In rural Virginia, the Blackfriars Playhouse, part of the American Shakespeare Center, moved their 2020 season online to their proprietary streaming platform called BLKFRSTV.
- 48 The pandemic has caused grief and damage to social infrastructures, but it has also helped a few theatre companies reach mass, global audiences on an unprecedented scale. By May 18, 2020, the London Globe already garnered 1.9 million viewers on their YouTube channel, which was cited by the organization as evidence of the “huge appetite for culture at a time of national crisis” when they bid for support from the UK’s Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sports during the lockdown.⁴² The Globe is unique among British theatres in that it has a predominantly international, tourist audience base even before the pandemic.
- 49 Theatre seating capacity was no longer a concern. The Donmar Warehouse’s *Coriolanus* (dir. Josie Rourke, 2013), starring Tom Hiddleston, on “National Theatre at Home” attracted more than half a million views and raised US\$ 20,691 between 4 and 11 June 2020. Significantly, this was a 2013, rather than a new, production that the organizers brought online during the pandemic. The number of online participants far exceeds the number of audiences a live production could ever reach within the same one-week period. The Donmar auditorium has only 251 seats; even the National Theatre has a total of only 2,417 seats across its three venues.
- 50 The Royal Shakespeare Company took digital performance one step further by enabling live, audience interaction with the actors digitally. In March, 2021, the RSC launched an innovative one-hour musical show online, *Dream* (dir. Robin McNicholas), which was inspired by *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Using live capture and gaming technologies, the camera took online audiences backstage and onstage before going into a virtual reality environment.



Figure 6. *Dream*, directed by Robin McNicholas, Royal Shakespeare Company Online, March 2021. Screen grab (live streaming).

- 51 The movements of fairies generate live sound and music. Cobweb is represented as closeup shots of Maggie Bain's staring eyeball. Wearing motion capture sensors over her suit, E. M. Williams is transformed into Puck, a figure that wanders the night as an assemblage of pebbles in the shape of a human body. Audiences follow her through computer-generated forests and landscapes. On Tuesday, March 16, more than 7,000 ticket holders logged on to watch the show live, some of whom used the interactive feature by clicking on firefly icons to light up the path for Puck. The fireflies, however, were ornamental, as they did not have any direct impact on the performance or Puck's movement.
- 52 The highlight was the show's global reach. Questions came in from all over the world, from as far as Melbourne, during the post-show discussion session. The global visibility and huge turnout were welcome news for the RSC, but the technological wonders failed to woo some critics. *The New York Times* called it "a small copse of some really lovingly rendered trees." *The Guardian* acknowledges the technology could well be "a new arrow for the quiver of live theatre" while critiquing the show's lack of "an emotional dimension."⁴³
- 53 The key takeaways from digital theatre in the era of COVID-19 are expanded notions of liveness and site-specific epistemologies. The site of live performance is distinct from the site where at-home audiences experience that performance – mediated by technologies of representation and their computer screens. The notion of a performance site is no longer tied to a brick-and-mortar building. Financial gains remain ancillary to online performances during the pandemic, because not all productions translate well to digital streaming. The theatres' global digital footprint is a symbolic means to connect with their patrons and to maintain the companies' cultural capital.

Conclusion

- 54 While in the 1990s audiences typically encountered Shakespeare for the first time through film or theatre, in our times the initial encounters occur predominantly on digital platforms in the form of video clips, memes or quotes. It has become more

common for non-professional readers and audiences to encounter global Shakespeares in fragmented forms, such as the Ophelia scene in *Barakah Meets Barakah*.

- 55 Global studies contribute site-specific epistemologies to our understanding of what Shakespeare means today in different locations. Site-specific meanings of literature take embodied and disembodied forms in performance and digital cultures. The pandemic has highlighted further the importance of networks of instantaneous cross references as well as localized, embodied knowledge about Shakespeare. Stage and digital technologies of representation further contribute to this repertoire of evolving, shared knowledge. To further our understanding of Shakespeare in the post-pandemic era, it is important to engage with the hybrid cultural themes that inform many adaptations.

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ABSTRACTS

Shakespeare adaptations share an intimate relation with global studies, because Shakespeare – as a cultural institution – registers a broad spectrum of practices that generate productive dialogues with world cultures. Global studies enables us to examine deceptively harmonious images of Shakespeare's works. This paper examines culturally fluid, contemporary adaptations in relation to digital cultures. Mining rhizomatic and non-linear flows of tropes, my approach evaluates the connections among Saudi, Bollywood, and French New Wave films.

The second part of this paper traces global Shakespeares during the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020. While the global pandemic closed live theatre events and cinemas worldwide, it also ushered in a new phase of globalization fuelled by on-demand digital videos as at-home audiences took to streaming to engage with Shakespeare. In tandem with the spread of coronavirus, there is a global viral spread of Shakespeare that carries site-specific meanings with them in disembodied forms.

Delineating the relations between Shakespeare and global studies in adaptations and in digital culture, this paper outlines the future challenges and opportunities for the fields.

Les adaptations de Shakespeare entretiennent un lien privilégié avec les études de la mondialisation, car Shakespeare, en tant qu'institution culturelle, recouvre un large éventail de pratiques qui génèrent des dialogues productifs avec les cultures du monde. Les études mondiales nous permettent d'examiner une certaine image, trop simpliste, des œuvres de Shakespeare. Grâce aux méthodologies rhizomatiques de Deleuze et Guattari, cet article analyse les adaptations contemporaines et les met en vis-à-vis avec les cultures numériques. En explorant les connexions non linéaires entre les cultures, mon approche approfondit les liens entre les films saoudiens, les films bollywoodiens et les films français de la Nouvelle Vague.

La deuxième partie de cet article parcourt les adaptations internationales de Shakespeare durant l'épidémie de COVID-19 au début de l'année 2020. Alors que la pandémie a conduit à la fermeture des salles de cinéma et l'arrêt des représentations théâtrales non virtuelles dans le monde entier, elle a également inauguré une nouvelle phase de mondialisation alimentée par un circuit de vidéos à la demande, que les spectateurs ont adopté afin d'entretenir leur passion pour Shakespeare. Parallèlement à la propagation du coronavirus, on a pu observer une propagation virale mondiale de Shakespeare à travers des flux numériques qui apportent un nouveau sens en dépit d'une forme désincarnée.

En juxtaposant les contextes culturels et la portée locale de trois films avec l'émergence de significations numériques inédites, cet article décrit les futurs défis et opportunités qui se profilent pour Shakespeare et les études de la mondialisation.

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Mots-clés: adaptations, études globales, théorie du genre, *Ophélie* par Claude Chabrol (1963), *Barakah Meets Barakah* par Mahmoud Sabbagh (2016), *The Hungry* par Bornila Chatterjee (2017), *Finch* (2021) par Miguel Sapochnik, *Shang-Chi and The Legend of The Ten Rings* (2021) par Destin Daniel Cretton, *Rêves* (2021) par Royal Shakespeare Company, le COVID-19, cultures numériques

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